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REPORT TO REGIONAL PARKS COMMITTEE MEETING OF WEDNESDAY, APRIL 28, 2021

SUBJECT **CRD Regional Parks Mountain Biking Guidelines**

ISSUE SUMMARY

To seek direction on the proposed Capital Regional District (CRD) Regional Parks Mountain Biking Guidelines.

BACKGROUND

A Notice of Motion was introduced at the October 23, 2019 Parks & Environment Committee meeting recommending that the CRD Board approve a budget, provide staffing and request that staff develop a Terms of Reference (TOR) for an advisory committee with the goal of developing a mountain biking policy for CRD Regional Parks within a defined timeframe.

On October 30, 2019, the CRD Board, at a special meeting, recommended the approval of \$40,000 in the 2020 Financial Plan to support the creation of an advisory committee to support the development of a mountain biking policy. The Notice of Motion was approved by the CRD Board on November 13, 2019.

In response to the Notice of Motion, staff developed a draft TOR for an advisory committee to provide advice and guidance for the use of developing mountain biking guidelines in CRD regional parks. On May 27, 2020, the TOR for a Mountain Biking Advisory Committee was approved by the CRD Board.

The Mountain Biking Advisory Committee (MBAC) is comprised of people in the capital region with an interest in recreation and a knowledge of the regional park system. The members of the advisory committee represent a variety of stakeholders with diverse backgrounds, interests and geographical locations. The MBAC developed an advice and guidance report (Appendix B) to support staff in the development of the CRD Regional Parks Mountain Biking Guidelines (Appendix A). The MBAC was provided the draft guidelines for review and CRD staff further refined the mountain biking guidelines after receiving their feedback. Advice and guidance that fell outside of the MBAC terms of reference has been considered for further action and based on this, a set of short-term actions have been identified (Appendix C). A longer-term vision for mountain biking in the CRD will be addressed during the upcoming Regional Parks Strategic Plan update.

Implementation of the guidelines is forward-looking. They do not automatically apply retroactively to regional parks or trails. The guidelines will be used to bring about consistency and structure to decisions regarding mountain biking within the regional park system.

ALTERNATIVES

Alternative 1

The Regional Parks Committee recommends to the Capital Regional District Board:

That the CRD Regional Parks Mountain Biking Guidelines and the Short-term Actions to support the Mountain Biking Advisory Committee Advice and Guidance Report be approved.

Alternative 2

That this report be referred back to staff for additional information.

IMPLICATIONS

Social Implications

The mountain biking guidelines provide a transparent process for identifying the most appropriate mountain biking areas within regional parks and acknowledges that there is a desire for more quality mountain biking experiences in the system. As of 2020, Regional Parks has 239 kilometres of trails that allow mountain biking. Although not necessarily optimized or rated for mountain biking, they offer some form of mountain biking or cycling. Out of these trails, 67 kilometres have been assessed and given a difficulty rating for mountain biking.

Environmental & Climate Implications

With 8.5 million visits to the regional parks system in 2020, it is important to manage and minimize possible ecological impacts caused by recreational activities on parks ecosystems. Protecting sensitive ecosystems and biodiversity are key factors to creating resiliency towards climate change. The mountain biking guidelines will provide the CRD additional tools that it needs to establish quality mountain biking opportunities while ensuring adequate and ongoing protection of cultural and environmental values, such as species, habitats and ecosystems within the regional parks system.

Intergovernmental Implications

CRD regional parks are part of a network of local, regional, provincial, federal and private mountain biking opportunities across the landscape. Given that the CRD is not able to meet the current demand for mountain biking opportunities, a region-wide approach is required in order to provide a diversity of cycling experiences and opportunities within the larger capital region for regional residents and visitors. CRD regional parks play a role in providing mountain biking opportunities as well as optimizing existing trails/trail networks that contribute to the overall mountain biking experience.

Service Delivery Implications

The CRD recognizes there is a gap between the demand for mountain biking and the outdoor recreation offered in the region. Although the full demand may never be met within regional parks, the CRD will continue to play a role in providing mountain biking areas and opportunities when identified through a park management planning process.

Any land altering works need to be carefully assessed with the lens of protecting both ecological and cultural values. To minimize impacts to cultural resources, CRD will be working with local First Nations, where possible, to better understand the cultural values on the landscape and ensure that recreational uses are compatible. The CRD follows cultural heritage policies and legislation during planning processes and land altering works to protect archaeological, cultural and heritage values in the CRD.

Recognizing that mountain biking groups play a key role in championing mountain biking etiquette and sanctioned trails, monitoring and advocating for safe and quality experiences and celebrating the recreational community, mountain biking experiences in the region are likely to be more successful when involving a local mountain biking group.

Alignment with Existing Plans & Strategies

The 2012-2021 Regional Parks Strategic Plan identifies some of the challenges facing the regional park system. One challenge is placing the right activity in the right area, within the context of the vision and designated purpose of the regional park system and of specific parks or trails. Given that mountain biking guidelines cannot supersede other planning processes, these guidelines have been drafted with the purpose of providing specific direction and a systematic and consistent decision-making process for planning, developing and managing mountain biking activities throughout CRD regional parks. These guidelines do not provide a plan for where, how and when mountain biking opportunities should occur in regional parks, rather guide established decision-making processes that identify mountain biking opportunities, such as the park management planning processes.

It's important to note that the guidelines document will never be one size fits all for addressing all the experiences and expectations of stakeholder groups. As such, there are some aspects of the advice provided by MBAC which are not reflected in the guidelines as they were out of scope of the TOR. This should not be perceived as a lack of commitment to addressing the advice and guidance provided by the MBAC.

To that end, a series of short-term actions have been provided (Appendix C) to support and enhance mountain biking in regional parks where mountain biking is identified as an acceptable use.

Staff see the guidelines as the first step towards the CRD and the various stakeholders working closer together to continue to build better and more sustainable quality mountain biking experiences in the regional parks system.

CONCLUSION

A Notice of Motion was approved by the CRD Board on November 13, 2019 to create an advisory committee to support the development of a mountain biking policy. With the advice and guidance from the Mountain Biking Advisory Committee, staff have developed and sought approval for the CRD Regional Parks Mountain Biking Guidelines. The guidelines are forward-looking and will provide a consistent approach to assessing and managing the provision of mountain biking opportunities within CRD regional parks over time.

RECOMMENDATION

The Regional Parks Committee recommends to the Capital Regional District Board:

That the CRD Regional Parks Mountain Biking Guidelines and the Short-term Actions to support the Mountain Biking Advisory Committee Advice and Guidance Report be approved.

Submitted by:	Jeff Leahy, RPF, Senior Manager, Regional Parks
Concurrence:	Larisa Hutcheson, P.Eng., General Manager, Parks & Environmental Services
Concurrence:	Robert Lapham, MCIP, RPP, Chief Administrative Officer

ATTACHMENTS

Appendix A: CRD Regional Parks Mountain Biking Guidelines

Appendix B: MBAC Mountain Bike Guidelines: Advice and guidance to CRD Regional Parks report

Appendix C: Short-term Actions to support the MBAC Advice and Guidance Report